



# Evidence-Based Budgeting (EBB) Training

Script

Introduction

**Slide 1: Evidence-Based Budgeting (EBB) Training**

Slide One: Evidence-Based Budgeting (or EBB) Training

Welcome to the Evidence-Based Budgeting Training. This training is designed for Veterans Benefits Administration (or VBA) Budget Analysts and others involved in incorporating evidence into their program area’s Budget Narratives for their budget cycles.

**Slide 2: Course Overview**

Slide Two, Course Overview

The purpose of this course is to provide baseline training in Talent Management System (or TMS) for employees in each Business Line and Staff Office who work on developing Budget Narratives to support budget needs based on the guidance provided by VA Central Office and the Office of Management and Budget (or OMB).

This course covers the following topics:

* Background and Purpose of EBB
* EBB Requirements, Roles, and Responsibilities
* What Strong Evidence Looks Like
* How to Perform a Self-Evaluation
* OSSI Independent Evaluation Feedback, and
* The Now, Next, and Beyond for VBA Evidence-Based Activities

We will review VBA’s EBB requirements, roles, and responsibilities by describing the primary activities of the VBA Evidence-Based Budgeting process and the roles and responsibilities of the Business Lines and Staff Offices, VBA Office of Strategic Support and Initiatives (or OSSI), and VBA Office of Financial Management (or OFM) in EBB activities.

We will cover what strong evidence looks like by identifying ways to best use data as evidence and the characteristics of strong versus insufficient evidence.

We will describe how to perform a self-evaluation using a scoring rubric and identify how to strengthen evidence based on evaluation feedback.

We will review how OSSI conducts EBB evaluations and identify EBB process events, steps, and expectations.

At the end of each section is a knowledge check, though no exam or other testing is associated with this course.

**Slide 3: Course Learning Objectives**

Slide Three, Course Learning Objectives

After completing this course, you will be able to support Budget Narrative development based on the guidance provided by VA Central Office and OMB. This outcome is supported by the following objectives:

* Define EBB, explain the purpose of EBB, and list the key EBB guidance documents.
* Describe the four primary activities of the VBA EBB process.
* Describe the roles and responsibilities of the Business Lines and Staff Offices, OSSI, and OFM in EBB activities.
* Identify items that can be used as evidence.
* Recognize the characteristics of strong and insufficient evidence.
* Determine the program areas for which a self-evaluation is required.
* Determine a score based on evaluations.
* Describe OSSI’s process for conducting EBB independent evaluations, and
* Identify EBB processes and their timelines.

**Slide 4: Key Terms and Acronyms**

Slide Four, Key Terms and Acronyms

Let’s take a moment to become familiar with a few key terms and acronyms that will be used throughout this training.

* The terms Business Line and Staff Office are often abbreviated and combined as BL/SO.
* EBA is Evidence-Based Activities.
* EBB is Evidence-Based Budgeting.
* EBP is Evidence-Based Policymaking.
* Note that this training considers Evidence-Based Activities to be the combination of EBB and EBP. Additionally, EBP training is now available in TMS, and a list of these courses is located in the resources document.
* OSSI is Office of Strategic Support and Initiatives.
* OFM is Office of Financial Management.
* OM is Office of Management.
* OMB is Office of Management and Budget.
* SOE is strength of evidence.
* And a rubric is the scoring framework developed by OSSI for Business Lines and Staff Offices to perform self-evaluations and for scoring Budget Narratives for strength of evidence.

Section 1: Background and Purpose of EBB

**Slide 5: Section 1: Background and Purpose of EBB**

Slide Five, Section 1: Background and Purpose of EBB

Let’s begin by exploring the background and purpose of EBB.

**Slide 6: Section 1: Learning Objectives**

Slide Six, Section 1: Learning Objectives

After completing this section, you will be able to define EBB, explain the purpose of EBB, and list the key EBB guidance documents.

**Slide 7: Evidence-Based Budgeting**

Slide Seven, Evidence-Based Budgeting

EBB is the documentation of evidence in making decisions about resource needs and allocations, as well as related policies, to achieve desired outcomes.

Understanding EBB involves understanding evidence—the available body of facts or information indicating whether a belief or proposition is true or valid.

Evidence can be quantitative or qualitative and may originate from a variety of sources, such as foundational fact finding, performance measurement, policy analysis, or program evaluation.

Additionally, the quality of evidence may be dependent on data collection validity, type of analysis, currency, and other factors.

In this training, we will explore possible sources of evidence when preparing Budget Narratives.

**Slide 8: Evidence-Based Budgeting (Cont.)**

Slide Eight, Evidence Based Budgeting Continued

One problem facing Evidence-Based Budgeting is that Federal agencies sometimes lack the evidence and data necessary to make critical decisions about program operations, policy, and regulations or to gain visibility into the impact of resource allocation on achieving program objectives.

The solution is for agencies to engage in EBB to enhance their ability to make evidence-based decisions by identifying programs and compiling existing evidence of their effectiveness, identifying gaps in the understanding of the program’s effectiveness, and developing a plan to improve the quantity or quality of evidence.

Based on feedback and guidance from OMB, VA Central Office continues its efforts to ensure improvements in both the use and strength of evidence in Budget Narratives for budget cycles.

The [*OMB, “Phase 1 Implementation of the Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act of 2018: Learning Agendas, Personnel, and Planning Guidance,” dated July 2019*](https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/M-19-23.pdf), is provided as a resource for download as part of this training.

**Slide 9: EBB Relationship to Budget Cycle**

Slide Nine, EBB Relationship to Budget Cycle

Between January and September, VBA conducts several EBB activities aligned to the various programming and formulation budget cycles.

In January, Business Lines and Staff Offices receive guidance to start the programming cycle, and OSSI updates the EBB Playbook.

In February, Business Lines and Staff Offices begin the Budget Request Intake Tool (or BRIT) Hypercare, and OSSI shares the EBB Playbook. Business Lines and Staff Offices begin the EBB process, and OSSI supports Business Lines and Staff Offices upon request.

In March, the Budget Director begins Budget Briefings with each Business Line and Staff Office, and OSSI attends OFM Budget Briefings to address any EBB-related questions. OSSI also encourages Business Lines and Staff Offices to provide a list of program areas tentatively selected for EBB self-evaluation.

In April and May, OFM hosts the Congressional Justifications kick-off meeting. The Business Lines and Staff Offices begin updating Budget Narratives with intermittent meetings with OFM, and OSSI works with OFM to determine program areas for independent evaluation based on the consolidated budget submitted to the CFO. OSSI, upon request, assists the Business Lines and Staff Offices in conducting self-assessment workshops to support development of Budget Narratives.

In June, Business Lines and Staff Offices submit Budget Narratives to OFM, along with submitting any self-evaluations to OSSI.

In July and August, the Business Lines and Staff Offices work with OFM to revise Budget Exhibits and Narratives, and OSSI completes independent evaluations on selected Business Line and Staff Office program areas.

In September, OFM submits Budget Narratives to Office of Management (or OM). OM then submits Budget Narratives to OMB, and OSSI holds feedback sessions with the Business Lines and Staff Offices to discuss scoring, findings, and next steps.

Business Lines and Staff Offices should refer to current General Operating Expense (or GOE) Internal Budget Calls for specific actions, requirements, and timelines related to the budget cycle.

We will address these activities in more detail throughout this training.

**Slide 10: Key Guidance Documents to Support EBB**

Slide Ten, Key Guidance Documents to Support EBB

Several critical documents provide guidance in Evidence-Based Budgeting across the government.

The Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act of 2018, or Public Law 115-435, was passed in 2018 and enacted in January 2019. This federal law creates the requirement for the use of evidence across all government departments.

OMB Memo 19-23, titled Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking, describes requirements and key deadlines for deliverables and initiates standards for evidence that will be used in the development of EBP at VA. This memorandum also expands the definition of evidence from that defined in the Evidence Act.

The June 2019 edition of OMB Circular A-11, titled “The Preparation, Submission, and Execution of the Budget,” details and explains the relationships between strategic plans, annual performance plans, andagency budgets. EBB-relevant material can be found in Circular A-11 Section 51.2: Requirements for Program Justifications and in Section 290: Evaluation and Evidence-Based Budgeting Activities.

**Slide 11: EBB OMB Requirements – Circular A-11**

Slide Eleven, EBB OMB Requirements – Circular A-11

The EBB requirements from the June 2019 edition of OMB Circular A-11 includes guidance:

* To strengthen the use of data and evidence to drive better decision making and achieve greater impact and efficiencies; and
* To incorporate a thorough discussion of the evidence, both positive and negative, for major proposed policies and funding levels into budget justifications, which can include:
  + A comparison of total program benefits and total program costs, using quantitative, objective data to the maximum extent possible, as well as qualitative material.
  + A comparison of the marginal benefits and costs associated with the proposal; and
  + Supporting information that considers agency and external program evaluations and related analytic studies and whether they agree with the proposed policy.

**Slide 12: Section 1:** **Learning Objectives Achieved**

Slide Twelve, Section 1: Learning Objectives Achieved

Now that Section 1 of this training is complete, you should be able to define and explain the purpose of Evidence-Based Budgeting and list key guidance documents that support EBB.

**Slide 13: Knowledge Check 1**

Slide Thirteen, Knowledge Check 1

What is the definition of Evidence-Based Budgeting?

1. The available body of facts or information indicating whether a belief or proposition is true or valid.
2. A comprehensive approach to making effective decisions based on the analysis of reliable information.
3. The documentation of evidence in making decisions about resource needs and allocations.

**Slide 14: Knowledge Check 1 Answer**

Slide Fourteen, Knowledge Check 1 Answer

The correct answer is C. EBB is the documentation of evidence in making decisions about resource needs and allocations.

A is the definition of evidence, and B more closely aligns with the general evidence-based decision-making process.

**Slide 15: Section 1: Conclusion**

Slide Fifteen, Section 1: Conclusion

Congratulations! You have completed Section 1: Background and Purpose of EBB.

When ready, continue to Section 2: EBB Requirements, Roles, and Responsibilities.

Section 2: EBB Requirements, Roles, and Responsibilities

**Slide 16: Section 2: EBB Requirements, Roles, and Responsibilities**

Slide Sixteen, Section 2: EBB Requirements, Roles, and Responsibilities

We will now cover EBB requirements, roles, and responsibilities.

**Slide 17: Section 2: Learning Objectives**

Slide Seventeen, Section 2: Learning Objectives

After completing this section, you will be able to describe the four primary activities of the VBA EBB process and describe the roles and responsibilities of the Business Line and Staff Office, OSSI, and OFM in EBB activities.

**Slide 18: Requirements, Roles, and Responsibilities**

Slide Eighteen, Requirements, Roles, and Responsibilities

VBA’s EBB process includes four primary activities.

The first activity is EBB Self-Evaluation. To measure and improve strength of evidence in annual budget submissions, VBA Business Lines and Staff Offices are strongly encouraged to conduct EBB self-evaluations for individual program areas as detailed in their organization’s Budget Narratives. Doing so allows offices to have a hands-on approach to measuring and improving strength of evidence in budget submissions.

The second activity is EBB Rescoring. If a previous self-evaluation resulted in strengthening the evidence in Budget Narrative content, as a whole or in specific areas, the Business Line or Staff Office is advised to perform another self-evaluation and update its scoring. Doing so helps to gauge improvements and identify remaining opportunities for improvement.

**Slide 19: Requirements, Roles, and Responsibilities (Cont.)**

Slide Nineteen, Requirements, Roles, and Responsibilities Continued

The third activity is EBB Consultative Assistance. OSSI provides consultative assistance related to EBB and strength of evidence to Business Lines and Staff Offices, upon request, for any areas of the Budget Narratives. This assistance includes addressing any questions and holding working sessions to discuss specific issues and challenges related to strength of evidence.

The last activity is EBB Independent Evaluation. OSSI implemented a Quality Control Improvement Process (or QCIP) to evaluate strength of evidence. OSSI conducts an independent evaluation of at least two program areas for each Business Line or Staff Office. These independent evaluations use the same checklist as the self-evaluation, including details related to scoring, strengths, and opportunities for improvement.

The intention of the QCIP is to provide an independent assessment of the strength of evidence in the Budget Narratives, which may result in additional guidance for internal self-evaluation teams when differences in scoring exist.

**Slide 20: BL/SO** **EBB Roles and Responsibilities**

Slide Twenty, Business Line and Staff Office EBB Roles and Responsibilities

Business Lines and Staff Offices have three primary roles in the EBB process.

Leadership personnel are responsible for the overall Budget Narratives and compliance with EBB requirements, which likely include evidence development and policymaking decisions based on the evidence.

Budget Narrative Preparers, as Subject Matter Experts (or SMEs) in this area, are responsible for:

* Developing Budget Narratives for program areas using the strongest available evidence.
* Working with program area leaders to note where strength of evidence is sufficient and where it must be improved, based on the EBB evaluation rubric and scoring process.
* Updating Budget Narratives as needed; and
* Advising Leadership on progress and findings that can improve strength of evidence within the organization.

Evaluators are responsible for scoring and rescoring Budget Narratives using the strength of evidence rubric and scoring guidelines provided by OSSI. Evaluators are also responsible for sharing evaluation feedback with Budget Narrative Preparers and Leadership, if requested.

The Budget Narrative Preparers and Evaluators may be the same person within some Business Lines or Staff Offices, though this practice is not recommended. These roles are distinct, and objectivity would be improved if different individuals assume the responsibilities of the unique roles.

**Slide 21: OSSI EBB Roles and Responsibilities**

Slide Twenty-One, OSSI EBB Roles and Responsibilities

OSSI has three primary roles in the EBB process.

Leadership personnel support VBA Business Lines and Staff Offices with EBP and EBB activities and reporting on the EBB process and quality reviews to Senior Leadership.

EBB Advisors, who are OSSI Strategists, support Business Lines and Staff Offices with EBB activities and improving strength of evidence in Budget Narratives.

EBB Quality Reviewers complete independent evaluations of selected program areas and share feedback from the evaluations. This process involves the same rubric as the self-evaluations.

**Slide 22: OFM EBB Roles and Responsibilities**

Slide Twenty-Two, OFM EBB Roles and Responsibilities

OFM has two primary roles in the EBB process.

Leadership personnel communicate and promote the importance of EBP and EBB activities for VBA. This responsibility is included in OFM’s Budget Call Memos, noting that “VBA will continue maturing our efforts to incorporate evidence-based content to help defend our President’s Budget request.”

Financial Oversight personnel within OFM staff oversee and execute the budget process for VBA, provide related guidance to Business Lines and Staff Offices, and conduct budget activities and interactions with Business Lines and Staff Offices according to established timelines.

**Slide 23: Section 2: Learning Objectives Achieved**

Slide Twenty-Three, Section 2: Learning Objectives Achieved

Now that Section 2 of this training is complete, you should be able to describe the four primary activities of the VBA EBB process and describe the roles and responsibilities of the Business Line and Staff Office, OSSI, and OFM in EBB activities.

**Slide 24: Knowledge Check 2**

Slide Twenty-Four, Knowledge Check 2

Which of the following roles is NOT associated with VBA’s EBB activities?

A. Budget Narrative Preparer

B. Evaluator

C. Evidence Approver

D. Leadership

**Slide 25: Knowledge Check 2 Answer**

Slide Twenty-Five, Knowledge Check 2 Answer

The correct answer is C. A dedicated Evidence Approver role is not part of the EBB process. OSSI’s role is not to approve evidence but instead is to provide support and feedback related to EBB to VBA Business Lines and Staff Offices.

**Slide 26: Section 2: Conclusion**

Slide Twenty-Six, Section 2: Conclusion

Congratulations! You have completed Section 2: EBB Requirements, Roles, and Responsibilities.

When ready, continue to Section 3: What Strong Evidence Looks Like.

Section 3: What Strong Evidence Looks Like

**Slide 27: Section 3: What Strong Evidence Looks Like**

Slide Twenty-Seven, Section 3: What Strong Evidence Looks Like

We will now address how to identify strong evidence in a Budget Narrative.

**Slide 28: Section 3: Learning Objectives**

Slide Twenty-Eight, Section Three: Learning Objectives

After completing this section, you will be able to identify items that can be used as evidence and recognize the characteristics of strong and insufficient evidence.

**Slide 29: Identifying Compelling Evidence**

Slide Twenty-Nine, Identifying Compelling Evidence

Evidence is not simply data or information. Data must be collected and refined to be useful and relevant information. Information must also be analyzed and assessed for patterns or other insights before it can be considered evidence to be used for evidence-based decision making. This process of evolving data to evidence leads to conclusions that inform knowledge.

**Slide 30: Items to Leverage for Evidence**

Slide Thirty, Items to Leverage for Evidence

VBA Business Lines and Staff Offices have access to multiple sources of evidence for developing Budget Narratives. This slide displays a non-exhaustive list of activities or analyses that may be the source supporting evidence to be used by Business Lines and Staff Offices. A few common sources are cost–benefit analyses, business cases, surveys, operational performance measures, and various assessments and studies. A more extensive list of evidence sources is provided within TMS downloads.

**Slide 31: Turning Data into Evidence**

Slide Thirty-One, Turning Data into Evidence

As noted earlier, data is refined and analyzed to develop evidence, which can be used to draw conclusions, make recommendations, and inform knowledge.

Data is most effectively used as evidence when it:

* Provides quantitative or qualitative estimates of the impact to Veterans, particularly in terms of lives saved, property maintained, or economic activity generated to the benefit of the Veteran;
* Is specific as to the impacts and/or mitigations, meaning it provides impacts specific to locations or sites, target populations, or particular stakeholders,
* Is referenced within the document as a detailed footnote including the source; and
* Describes what will change in the organizations’ structure and function as a direct result of the budget adjustment.

**Slide 32: Turning Data into Evidence (Cont.)**

Slide Thirty-Two, Turning Data into Evidence Continued

Additional considerations for effectively using data for evidence include determining whether the data:

* Explicitly defines the link between the evidence and the claim (for example, it does not force the reader to draw a conclusion or assume they will understand an implicit point);
* Points out the risks of NOT making the budget adjustment;
* Allows for the possibility of being enhanced or combined with elements that can be presented in tabular or graphic format; and
* Includes reference to overarching strategic plans or ways the budget action supports achievement of a particular VBA goal or objective.

**Slide 33: Relationship to EBP**

Slide Thirty-Three, Relationship to EBP

Evidence-Based Budgeting is closely related to Evidence-Based Policymaking, which is the process of gathering evidence, performing program evaluations, and making policy decisions that could have budget impacts. EBB incorporates relevant parts of that analysis into the Budget Narrative.

When developing a budget, evidence should be incorporated into budget and policy decisions. Evaluation of a Budget Narrative for strength of evidence may uncover a gap in available data sources. VBA Business Lines and Staff Offices should use this discovery to inform their EBP activities and develop a plan to fill any identified gaps.

**Slide 34: Section 3: Learning Objectives Achieved**

Slide Thirty-Four, Section 3: Learning Objectives Achieved

Now that Section 3 of this training is complete, you should be able to identify items that can be used as evidence and recognize the characteristics of strong and insufficient evidence.

**Slide 35: Knowledge Check 3**

Slide Thirty-Five, Knowledge Check 3

True or false: Sources of evidence used in Budget Narratives should be cited to enhance effectiveness.

**Slide 36: Knowledge Check 3 Answer**

Slide Thirty-Six, Knowledge Check Three Answer

The correct answer is True. Data is most effectively used as evidence when it is referenced with a document title or a detailed footnote that includes the specific finding or fact contained in the source.

**Slide 37: Section 3: Conclusion**

Slide Thirty-Seven, Section 3: Conclusion

Congratulations! You have completed Section 3: What Strong Evidence Looks Like.

When ready, continue to Section 4: How to Perform a Self-Evaluation.

Section 4: How to Perform a Self-Evaluation

**Slide 38: Section 4: How to Perform a Self-Evaluation**

Slide Thirty-Eight, Section 4: How to Perform a Self-Evaluation

We will now explore how a VBA Business Line or Staff Office can use the process and tools created by OSSI to conduct a self-evaluation of program areas in their Budget Narrative.

**Slide 39: Section 4: Learning Objectives**

Slide Thirty-Nine, Section 4: Learning Objectives

After completing this section, you will be able to determine the program areas for which a self-evaluation is required and determine a score based on evaluations.

**Slide 40: Defining a Program Area**

Slide Forty, Defining a Program Area

The first step involves defining the program areas that may be appropriate for self-evaluation.

Program areas listed in the Budget Narrative may be subject to self-evaluation if they are classified in one of the following categories:

1. A Title 38 Program, meaning its baseline requirement is from USC Title 38 Code of Federal Regulations core function;
2. Inclusion of a request for a programmatic or FTE increase; or
3. A new initiative or program.

When determining program areas for self-evaluations, priority is given in the following order: New Initiatives and Programs, then Programmatic and FTE Increases, followed by Total Funding.

**Slide 41: Scoring Rubric**

Slide Forty-One, Scoring Rubric

OSSI developed a scoring rubric consisting of 23 questions in 8 categories for Business Lines and Staff Offices to conduct a self-evaluation and score their use and strength of evidence in Budget Narratives.

The rubric is based on VHA’s Strength of Evidence Checklist, with guidance provided by VA Central Office, direction from OMB, and input from VBA’s Enterprise Risk Management team.

Categories in the rubric are: Background and Description, Need, Feasibility, Effectiveness, Cost, Comparison to Alternatives, Risks, and Evidence Recency.

The questions in the Background and Description section are designed to provide pertinent information about the project or program and any legal requirements or authority for the proposed project or program.

The questions in the Need section are designed to determine if the Budget Narrative provides a clear need for a novel approach or additional resources.

Feasibility-related questions gauge the degree to which the Budget Narrative demonstrates that the actions defined in the proposal can be implemented within the identified setting and/or timeframe.

Questions in the Effectiveness section support confirming that the proposed policy or program will be effective among the Veteran population and in achieving the intended outcome.

Cost-related questions determine if the Budget Narrative provides evidence that identifies impacts on internal or external budgets, and defines, explains, and supports all included budget items.

Questions related to the Comparison to Alternatives are designed to determine if the Budget Narrative includes evidence showing that alternative options were explored and justifiably excluded. Additionally, Budget Narratives should include sufficient evidence to justify the choice to individuals who may oppose it or prefer an alternative.

Questions in the Riskssection help to identify direct and indirect risks to the policies or programs and their impact on the achievements of VBA’s mission and strategic objectives.

Evidence Recency questions are designed to ensure the most up-to-date data is used for the project or program in question.

The recommended approach involves the selected program areas in the Budget Narrative being evaluated and scored by two separate individuals.

The questions are scored on a scale of 0 to 5 (for a total of 115 possible points) to discretely identify areas where evidence could be strengthened.

Note that the rubric is based on VA Central Office guidance. If VA Central Office issues new guidance regarding the rubric, the new guidance should be adhered to until this training can be updated to reflect changes.

**Slide 42: Rubric Categories: Background and Description**

Slide Forty-Two, Rubric Categories: Background and Description

We will now present in more detail what Evaluators should consider when scoring the questions in each section of the rubric.

The goal for the Background and Description section is to present a clear and concise description of the program effort that the proposal will benefit and to briefly explain the authority or requirement that underlies the proposal.

When scoring the questions in the Background and Description section, Evaluators should consider the category definition and the extent to which the narrative clearly describes the initiative, provides useful context on the initiative’s background, and clearly identifies any legal requirement or authority for the proposed effort.

**Slide 43: Rubric Categories: Need**

Slide Forty-Three, Rubric Categories: Need

In the Need category, the goal is to demonstrate a clear need for a novel approach or additional resources as identified in the proposal.

When scoring the questions in the Need section, Evaluators should consider the category definition and the extent to which the Narrative:

* Addresses the unique capability provided by the program;
* Demonstrates how the program area or request aligns to VBA goals and priorities;
* Articulates specific Veteran needs (or those of another stakeholder) that are addressed by the program area or request; and
* References (if applicable) any mandates or other regulatory requirements addressed by the program area or request.

**Slide 44: Rubric Categories: Feasibility**

Slide Forty-Four, Rubric Categories: Feasibility

The goal associated with the Feasibility category is to demonstrate that the actions defined in the proposal can be implemented in the identified setting and/or timeframe.

When scoring the questions in the Feasibility section, Evaluators should consider the category definition and the extent to which the Narrative:

* Discusses the context within which success will be measured, such as political environment, external markets, or administrative priorities;
* Uncovers and challenges any outdated assumptions about “what works”;
* Discusses if established targets (where applicable) are achievable and realistic under the proposed funding or resource levels; and
* Ensures alignment with the current logistical environment and identified areas of interest, goals, and strategic priorities of VBA Leadership.

**Slide 45: Rubric Categories: Effectiveness**

Slide Forty-Five, Rubric Categories: Effectiveness

The goal associated with the Effectiveness category is to demonstrate that the proposed policy or program will be successful among the Veteran population and will be useful in achieving the intended outcome.

When scoring the questions in the Effectiveness section, Evaluators should consider the category definition and the extent to which the Narrative:

* Includes a clear objective statement that explicitly states the knowledge, skills, or solutions expected to be attained through the program;
* Discusses whether performance objectives (or established targets, if applicable) were achieved in prior years, including factors that led to good or improved performance or factors that hindered performance;
* Notes if performance factors (positive or negative) are one-time influences or ongoing and explains why performance objectives were not met, if applicable; and
* Addresses if a test or pilot was conducted, along with the methodology and results or findings.

**Slide 46: Rubric Categories: Costs**

Slide Forty-Six, Rubric Categories: Costs

The goal for the Costs category is to provide evidence that identifies any impacts on internal or external budgets and defines, explains, and supports all included budget items.

When scoring the questions in the Costs section, Evaluators should consider the category definition and the extent to which the Narrative quantifies the costs of the program area or request, clearly articulates internal and external budget impacts, and explains that costs are associated with the intended capability delivered by the program.

**Slide 47: Rubric Categories: Comparison to Alternatives**

Slide Forty-Seven, Rubric Categories: Comparison to Alternatives

The goal of the Comparison to Alternatives category is to include evidence that shows that alternative policies or programs were explored and justifiably excluded in pursuit of the proposed policy or program. Sufficient evidence should be included to justify the choice of the proposed policy or program to individuals who may oppose it or prefer an alternative.

When scoring the questions in the Comparison to Alternatives section, Evaluators should consider the category definition and the extent to which the Narrative explains alternatives and provides analysis demonstrating why the proposed activities or requests are the preferred option, as well as articulates the impact of not doing or discontinuing what is requested or proposed.

**Slide 48: Rubric Categories: Risks**

Slide Forty-Eight, Rubric Categories: Risks

In the Risks category, the goal is to include evidence that identifies direct and indirect risks to the policy or program and its impacts on the achievements of VBA’s mission and strategic objectives.

When scoring the questions in the Risks section, Evaluators should consider the category definition and the extent to which the Narrative:

* Explains if the implementation or continuation of the initiative addresses the impacts on one or more of VBA's enterprise risks or makes that risk less likely;
* Explains the likelihood of a new enterprise-level risk or significant programmatic risk if the initiative is not implemented; and
* Explains if the evidence to understand the risk and to compare alternative options (including status quo) is clearly linked to the program area and enterprise risk.

**Slide 49: Rubric Categories: Evidence Recency**

Slide Forty-Nine, Rubric Categories: Evidence Recency

The goal associated with the Evidence Recency category is to explain how the current state of knowledge is reflected in the proposal.

When scoring the questions in the Evidence Recencysection, Evaluators should consider the category definition and the extent to which the Narrative demonstrates that the evidence is recent and/or aligned with current best practices and demonstrates that the evidence is valid, relevant, and reliable from reputable sources, such as Government Accountability Office (or GAO) reports, program evaluation reports, and academic literature.

**Slide 50: Understanding the Rubric**

Slide Fifty, Understanding the Rubric

The rubric contains 23 questions that are divided into the 8 categories just described.

Each question is scored between 0 and 5. It is recommended that the Evaluators use the following guidelines for scoring.

* 5 means that evidence is robust, relevant, and sufficient and supports proposal approval.
* 3 means that evidence is adequate and relevant and may support proposal approval.
* 1 means that evidence is minimal and may not support proposal approval.
* 0 means that evidence is not present or is unrelated.

This Microsoft Excel rubric is available in the Playbook for reference and use. This version includes a Comments section that can be used to document any concerns or recognized issues. For example, a Business Line or Staff Office can note that it recognizes the need to develop evidence for future years for questions with a score below 3.

**Slide 51: EBB Self-Evaluation and Rescoring**

Slide Fifty-One, EBB Self-Evaluation and Rescoring

Evaluators are strongly encouraged to conduct evaluations of selected program areas within their office’s Budget Narrative using the rubric and scoring criteria, along with the recommendation, if resources allow, for two Evaluators per program area evaluation to be assigned. Having two different individuals evaluate each program area is beneficial to provide a variety of perspectives and to validate the overall process. If possible, the Budget Preparer should not be one of the Evaluators.

Evaluators should conduct independent scoring efforts, then compare scores afterward to identify strengths and opportunities for improvement internally.

The two scores for each program area are then averaged for an initial score and shared with Budget Preparers. Each program area should be rescored whenever evidence has been strengthened based on initial evaluation score and feedback.

**Slide 52: EBB Scoring**

Slide Fifty-Two, EBB Scoring

The maximum points per question in the rubric is 5. With 23 questions in the rubric, the maximum possible total score is 115 points.

A score of 3 in all rubric questions represents a minimal level of acceptable evidence, demonstrating that evidence is adequate and relevant and may support proposal approval. Questions scored lower than 3 represent immediate opportunities for improvement.

The minimum target score to demonstrate acceptable evidence is 69 out of 115, or an average of 3s on all questions; however, the minimum level of evidence requirement stated above still applies for each question. To demonstrate compelling evidence, VBA Business Lines and Staff Offices should consider exceeding that minimum score.

If a program has no individual question scored lower than 3, it can be considered to have an overall status of Minimally Sufficient, Sufficient, or Meets Expectations.

If a program area has 1 or more individual questions scored lower than 3, it may have an overall status of Needs Improvement, Deficient, or Significantly Deficient.

**Slide 53: EBB Scoring: Color Code Chart**

Slide Fifty-Three, EBB Scoring: Color Code Chart

The overall score of the evaluation determines the overall status of the program from the evaluation. The color-coded triangle is a visual indicator for the overall status of the evaluated policy or program.

The Green triangle indicates that the overall total score was 90 or higher, meaning the evidence meets expectations. Any question with a score below 3 indicates a key focus area for improvement.

The Lime Green triangle indicates that the overall total score was between 80 and 89, meaning the evidence is sufficient. Any question with a score below 3 indicates a key focus area for improvement.

The Yellow triangle indicates that the overall total score was between 66 and 79, meaning the evidence is minimally sufficient. Any question with a score below 3 indicates a key focus area for improvement.

The Gold triangle indicates that the overall total score was between 40 and 65, meaning the evidence needs improvement. Questions with scores below 3 indicate key focus areas for improvement.

The Orange triangle color indicates that the overall total score was between 20 and 39, meaning the evidence is deficient. Questions with scores below 3 indicate key focus areas for improvement.

The Red triangle color indicates that the overall total score was between 0 and 19, meaning the evidence is significantly deficient. Questions with scores below 3 indicate key focus areas for improvement.

**Slide 54: Section 4: Learning Objectives Achieved**

Slide Fifty-Four, Section 4: Learning Objectives Achieved

Now that Section 4 of this training is complete, you should be able to determine the program areas for which a self-evaluation is required and determine a score based on evaluations.

**Slide 55: Knowledge Check 4**

Slide Fifty-Five, Knowledge Check 4

What are the categories of questions in the EBB self-evaluation rubric?

1. Background and Description, Need, Feasibility, Effectiveness, Cost, Comparison to Alternatives, Risks, and Evidence Recency
2. Background and Description, Need, Implementation, Value, Comparison to Alternatives, and Evidence Recency
3. Background and Description, Cost, Effectiveness, Performance, Impact, and Evidence Recency
4. Background and Description, Need, Feasibility, Cost, Impact, and Evidence Recency

**Slide 56: Knowledge Check 4 Answer**

Slide Fifty-Six, Knowledge Check 4 Answer

The correct answer is A: Background and Description, Need, Feasibility, Effectiveness, Cost, Comparison to Alternatives, Risks, and Evidence Recency.

**Slide 57: Section 4: Conclusion**

Slide Fifty-Seven, Section 4: Conclusion

Congratulations! You have completed Section 4: How to Perform a Self-Evaluation.

When ready, continue to Section 5: OSSI Independent Evaluation Feedback.

Section 5: OSSI Independent Evaluation Feedback

**Slide 58: Section 5: OSSI Independent Evaluation Feedback**

Slide Fifty-Eight, Section 5: OSSI Independent Evaluation Feedback

We will now describe the process of OSSI conducting independent evaluations of program areas within Budget Narratives.

**Slide 59: Section 5: Learning Objective**

Slide Fifty-Nine, Section 5: Learning Objective

After completing this section, you will be able to describe OSSI’s process for conducting EBB independent evaluations.

**Slide 60: Elements of OSSI Independent Evaluation**

Slide Sixty, Elements of OSSI Independent Evaluation

OSSI evaluates appropriate program areas per Business Line or Staff Office, with two OSSI Strategists conducting separate evaluations and the two scores being averaged to arrive at a final score. Feedback is provided on strengths and opportunities for improvement, with both linked to specific parts of the Budget Narrative.

OSSI establishes dedicated feedback sessions with each Business Line or Staff Office to share and discuss scores and findings. OSSI Strategists are also available to Business Lines and Staff Offices for consultation, upon request, throughout the EBB process.

**Slide 61: Example of Narrative Feedback**

Slide Sixty-One, Example of Narrative Feedback

OSSI’s feedback is compiled as a one-page summary.

This summary provides overall status, overall scoring, and high-level feedback on strength of evidence and opportunities for improvement.

Detailed recommendations are shared during dedicated feedback sessions with each office to discuss scoring, rationale, and suggestions for improving strength of evidence in the future.

The image shown here is a snapshot of a Fiscal Year 2026 feedback summary. Format and exact substance may change for future fiscal years.

**Slide 62: Improving Evidence**

Slide Sixty-Two, Improving Evidence

Business Lines and Staff Offices should incorporate feedback from OSSI’s independent evaluations to further strengthen evidence in future budget cycles.

Business Lines and Staff Offices should not edit their current Narratives based on feedback and recommendations from OSSI independent evaluations, unless directed by OFM to do so.

If gaps are identified and/or data is insufficient to update evidence, the Business Line or Staff Office should develop plans to gather the necessary data and incorporate these plans into its EBP activities.

OSSI is also available to address any subsequent questions or provide support, as needed.

**Slide 63: Section 5: Learning Objective Achieved**

Slide Sixty-Three, Section 5: Learning Objective Achieved

Now that Section 5 of this training is complete, you should be able to describe OSSI’s process for conducting independent EBB evaluations.

**Slide 64: Knowledge Check 5**

Slide Sixty-Four, Knowledge Check 5

True or False: Business Lines and Staff Offices should edit their current Budget Narratives based on feedback and recommendations from OSSI independent evaluations.

**Slide 65: Knowledge Check 5 Answer**

Slide Sixty-Five, Knowledge Check 5 Answer

The correct answer is False. Feedback and recommendations from OSSI independent evaluations should be used to further strengthen evidence in future budget cycles, not the current budget cycle.

**Slide 66: Section 5: Conclusion**

Slide Sixty-Six, Section Five: Conclusion

Congratulations! You have completed Section 5: OSSI Independent Evaluation Feedback.

When ready, continue to Section 6: The Now, Next, and Beyond for VBA Evidence-Based Activities.

Section 6: The Now, Next, and Beyond for VBA Evidence-Based Activities

**Slide 67: Section 6: The Now, Next, and Beyond for VBA Evidence-Based Activities**

Slide Sixty-Seven, Section 6: The Now, Next, and Beyond for VBA Evidence-Based Activities.

We will now review VBA’s current and planned evidence-based activities.

**Slide 68: Section 6: Learning Objective**

Slide Sixty-Eight, Section 6: Learning Objective

After completing this section, you will be able to identify EBB processes and their timelines.

**Slide 69: Timeline of EBB Activities**

Slide Sixty-Nine, Timeline of EBB Activities

Highlights of VBA’s EBB activity timeline from January to September is as follows:

* In January, OSSI develops EBB training materials and an EBB Playbook. The Playbook is shared with budget contacts and Senior Leadership at the end of January.
* In February, OSSI provides this EBB training to VBA Budget Analysts. Business Lines and Staff Offices begin the EBB process until submission of their Budget Narratives to OFM. OSSI is available at any point during this timeframe to address questions, hold working sessions, or review and evaluate draft Budget Narratives, upon request.
* In June, Business Lines and Staff Offices submit their Budget Narratives to OFM, along with any self-evaluations.
* In July, OSSI begins independent evaluations on select Business Line and Staff Office program areas.
* In September, OSSI holds feedback sessions with Business Lines and Staff Offices if an evaluation was requested to discuss scoring, findings, and next steps.

Note that OSSI provides consultative assistance throughout the process, upon request, using the same rubric and scoring as self-evaluations.

**Slide 70: Summary of EBB Process Activities and Roles**

Slide Seventy, Summary of EBB Process Activities and Roles

To summarize, Business Lines and Staff Offices and OSSI have important roles in the EBB process.

Business Lines and Staff Offices self-evaluate program areas for strength of evidence and record scores using the provided rubric. Business Lines and Staff Offices ensure connection between evidence, policymaking, and resource requests and rescore Budget Narratives after any revisions to strengthen evidence and gauge improvement.

EBB Advisors, who are OSSI Strategists, provide consultative support, upon request, to Business Lines and Staff Offices on EBB activities and hold working sessions.

OSSI Quality Reviewers conduct independent evaluations of at least two program areas for each Business Line or Staff Office and provide feedback.

**Slide 71: Section 6: Learning Objective Achieved**

Slide Seventy-One, Section 6: Learning Objective Achieved

Now that Section 6 of this training is complete, you should be able to identify EBB processes and their timelines.

**Slide 72: Thank you for participating in this training.**

Slide Seventy-Two, Thank you for participating in this training.

**Slide 73: Course Learning Objectives Achieved**

Slide Seventy-Three, Course Learning Objectives Achieved

You should now be able to support Budget Narrative development based on the guidance provided by VACO and OMB, according to this training’s objectives. You should be able to define EBB and explain its purpose, list the key EBB guidance documents, describe the four primary activities of the VBA EBB process, and describe the roles and responsibilities of the Business Lines and Staff Offices, OSSI, and OFM in EBB activities.

You should also be able to identify items that can be used as evidence and recognize the characteristics of strong and insufficient evidence.

Lastly, you should be able to determine the program areas for which a self-evaluation is required, determine a score based on evaluations, describe OSSI’s process for conducting EBB independent evaluations, and identify EBB process activities and their timelines.

For additional information, refer to the Evidence-Based Budgeting Training Companion Playbook located on VBA’s Knowledge Management tool.

If further assistance is needed, Business Lines and Staff Offices may request OSSI support via email at [OSSI.VBACO@VA.GOV](mailto:OSSI.VBACO@VA.GOV), noting “Evidence-Based Budgeting Support” in the subject line and including a summary of the request in the email message.

Thanks again for participating in this training!